

ACTION AID-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 DODE-00 WHA-00 PERC-00  
 SRPP-00 DS-00 EB-00 EUR-00 VC-00 H-00 TEDE-00  
 INR-00 VCE-00 AC-00 NSAE-00 ACE-00 IRM-00 DSCC-00  
 PRM-00 DRL-00 NFAT-00 SAS-00 /000W  
 -----E7A7DB 051300Z /38

R 051245Z FEB 04  
 FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4826  
 INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
 AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
 AMEMBASSY LISBON  
 AMEMBASSY MADRID  
 AMEMBASSY MEXICO  
 AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO  
 NSC WASHDC  
 USCINCSO MIAMI FL

RELEASED IN PART  
 B1, 1.4(D)

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000407

NSC FOR CBARTON  
 USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD  
 USAID DCHA/OTI FOR RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/03/2014  
 TAGS: PGOV, KDEM, VE  
 SUBJECT: ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK ON SIGNATURE COUNT

REF: A. CARACAS 00312  
 B. CARACAS 00310

Classified By: Mark Wells, Acting Political Counselor, for reasons 1.4  
 (B) and (D)

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 Summary  
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1. (C) Technical and organizational problems, suspected employee sabotage, and lethargic decision making continue to stymie progress of signature verifications collected to convoke recall referendums on President Hugo Chavez and 67 National Assembly deputies. National Electoral Council (CNE) President Francisco Carrasquero stated January 30 that the CNE would not make the February 13 verification deadline. The 40-person Superior Technical Committee began work on February 3. The CNE's decisions to send GOV-collected signatures back through the physical verification stage,

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
 CLASSIFIED BY DEPT. OF STATE, L. R. LOHMAN, DAS, A/RPS  
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS  
 CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)  
 DECLASSIFY AFTER: 4 FEB 2029  
 DATE/CASE ID: 02 NOV 2005 200304736

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produce signature form copies for the GOV's campaign to prove "mega fraud," and its inability to make decisions on verifying thumbprints or establish norms for the next stages of the process suggest more delays are imminent. End Summary.

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Recall Drives Plod Along  
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2. (C) National Electoral Council (CNE) progress verifying signature drives to convoke recall referendums on President Hugo Chavez and 67 National Assembly deputies continues at a slower than expected pace. The CNE announced January 29 that they had started the transcription of signatures collected to recall President Hugo Chavez on January 28, the second of a seven-stage process in the signature verification process.

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However, the CNE announced January 30 that they would require those signatures to go through the initial physical verification stage again because they had been approved using a less strict standard than the signatures gathered to recall Chavez. The CNE was almost finished physically verifying signatures collected to recall pro-GOV deputies on January 29, according to [REDACTED] He said enough signatures had already been invalidated to discount 11 of the 30 pro-GOV deputy drives.

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4. (C) Jorge Rodriguez confirmed publicly February 2 that the number of rejected signature collection forms suddenly spiked upwards during the physical verification of presidential recall signatures. He said the source of the "abnormalities" has been determined and employees involved have been fired. [REDACTED] claimed some Chavista transcriptionists were applying stricter standards to anti-GOV signature forms, such as

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overvigorously rejecting signatures because of transposed identification numbers, legibility issues, and thumbprint quality and were altering data, to include filling out blank spaces. He suspected CNE employees would overrule the "sabotage" committed by temporary workers during the next stages of the verification (cross-check, quality control, and Superior Technical Committee review), but not before burying the process in a mountain of unnecessary work.

5. (C) [ ] transcription delays are caused by lack of a consistent supply of signature forms to transcribers, insufficient manpower, salary issues, and problems with software and technical support. Staffing is

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particularly problematic for the night shift. [ ] claimed significant delays are caused by absenteeism (estimated at 15 to 20 percent by an OAS source, ref b) and deliberately slow work by Chavista employees who make up about 70 percent of the workforce in the physical revision and transcription stages of the process. Carrasquero claimed 80 percent of the regular CNE employees were allied to the opposition in response to recent criticism that the CNE was sending qualified employees on "vacations" and hiring hoards of Chavistas in an attempt to pack the CNE. OAS reported January 31 that the Quality Control process had not started for any of the drives. The 40-person Superior Technical Committee (CTS), the group that will review rejected signatures, began work on February 3.

6. (U) During his weekly televised address February 1, Chavez praised National Assembly Deputy Luis Tascon's efforts to obtain certified copies of the signature forms requesting a presidential recall. Chavez promised to dedicate an upcoming address to exposing the supposed fraud. Tascon is spearheading efforts by the GOV's electoral organizers, the "Comando Ayacucho," to initiate an investigation into signature collection fraud, such as signatures of the deceased, from citizens living abroad, or for signature forms that are not accounted for on daily tally sheets (actas). Tascon announced January 31 that the CNE agreed to oversee the photocopying of opposition signature forms with both opposition and GOV observers present, although Comando Ayacucho will cover the cost. He estimated the copies would be completed by mid-week. OAS reports confirm that photocopying started January 31 at the unanimous consent of the CNE directors and related the concern that this could further delay the process. Comando Ayacucho plans to collect complaints February 6-8 at voting centers national-wide from citizens who suspect their signatures were used illegally. Tascon said a report documenting the "mega-fraud" will be

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presented at a press conference tentatively planned for  
February 12.

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Whither the Thumbprints  
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7. (C) No decisions have been made regarding verification of thumbprints on signature forms. According to the February 1 edition of daily El Universal, French company Sagem estimated it would take at least three weeks to verify 500,000 thumb prints. The article also questioned the technical ability and resources of another potential contractor, Smartmatic, to verify the thumbprints. According to a November 2003 report from the Ministry of Interior and Justice, 3.24 million records with citizen thumbprints which would be used to verify the signature form prints have not been labeled or filed.

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Opposition Refuses to Give CNE Unqualified Support  
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8. (U) Following Chavez's January 15 statements that he would respect the CNE's decision "whatever that decision may be," GOV leaders have consistently badgered the opposition to make a similar claim. Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel characterized the CD's response as "a grave insult to the members of the CNE ... by inferring that they will produce a decision that's neither transparent or lawful." CD spokesman Americo Martin said February 1 that it would only respect the results of the CNE's verification process if it was "transparent," a message consistent with comments of most CD leaders the previous week. The CD has taken no formal position on whether or not it will unconditionally accept the CNE's verdict. (Comment: In his January 30 Diplomatic Corps greeting speech, Chavez said he would obey the CNE ruling, and even step down if he lost the referendum, "as long as this was done with respect for the constitution and without pressure (chantaje)" -- a message not dissimilar to the opposition's, but the opposition has not spun it as well.)

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Deadlines: Redrawing Lines in the Sand  
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9. (U) Members of the opposition alliance Democratic Coordinator (CD) met February 2 with Rodriguez to urge the JNE to stick to the February 13 deadline to conclude the verification process. On January 30, CNE Director Francisco Carrasquero confirmed the CNE would not complete the verification process by February 14, the end of the 30-day time limit for verification that officially started January 13. He added the CNE was in the process of "readjusting" its timetable and a new deadline would be announced within days. Rodriguez announced January 29 that a new CNE committee would release an exact date and new schedule within 24 hours. A formal announcement had not been made by February 4.

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Sumate Unveils Database  
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11. (U) The civil organization Sumate unveiled a computerized database of 388,000 signature collection forms calling for Chavez's recall. Petition signers can use their identification numbers to locate the digitally scanned forms they signed. After comparing the data with the Permanent Electoral Registry (REP) and accounting for entry errors and blank entries, Sumate concluded more than 3.1 million valid signatures were collected. During the last week of January, Sumate showed the database to the diplomatic corps, journalists, and President Carter, among others. The group plans to deliver copies of the database to the OAS and Carter Center.

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Comment  
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